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ABSTRACT

The Community College of Vermont (CCV), which was established in 1970, is described. CCF is a community-based, competency-based college without a campus directed primarily to adults who previously have found access to postsecondary education to be difficult. Classes are offered in various types of locations in the community, and instructors are paid on a per-course basis and usually hold full-time jobs in the community, practicing the skills they teach. The CCV staff operates from one central administrative office and nine field offices located throughout the state. Counselors and coordinators of instruction also provide essential services. CCV students receive neither grades nor credits; the associate degree is awarded on the basis of demonstrated skills and the acquisition of competencies defined in advance through a contract. Assessment is accomplished through student self-evaluation, evaluation by instructors, consultation with counselors, and periodic meetings with a review committee composed of a student, CCV staff member, community instructor, and community member chosen by the student. Three programs lead to an associate degree: administrative services, human services, and general studies. CCV provides different types of students with a variety of instructional settings: classes, experiential learning, independent study, and on-the-job training. A fifth instructional model is the cluster, a support group of students who meet together regularly to discuss personal concerns. CCV became accredited in 1975 and since its inception the college has needed to deal with four general issues: institutional legitimacy, financing, duplication of effort, and program quality. In addition to considering these concerns, a case study of a student is presented. (SW)

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# Inservice Education Program (IEP)

## Paper Presented at a Seminar for State Leaders in Postsecondary Education

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THE "WITHOUT WALLS" TYPE:
COMMUNITY COLLEGE OF VERMONT

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SHEEO

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"Case Study #1: The 'Without Walls' Type:
Community College of Vermont"

by

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Case Study: The Community College of Vermont

Funded by an OEO grant when it was established in 1970, the Community College of Vermont (CCV) has dedicated itself to serving those adults who have no other access to appropriate education. A community-based, competency-based college without a campus, CCV enables Vermonters to continue their education at home, taking courses nearby from instructors who often live in the students' own communities. The college is open to any resident of the state, regardless of age, financial situation, geographic location, or previous educational experience. CCV concentrates its services and efforts especially on people who have been discouraged in the past by high tution costs, distance from campuses, family or job responsibilities, or limiting admissions policies. At $35 per course, the college has the lowest tuition in the state.

The college provides quality education at reduced cost by avoiding the duplication of existing services and by using the talent and facilities already available in Vermont communities. The community is the "campus": classes are held in local schools, offices, banks, factories, churches -- wherever communities have donated space for CCV's use. A class in auto mechanics may meet at a service station,

a creative-writing class in a public library, and a psychology class in a local church.

Instructors are also drawn from the general community. Paid on a per-course basis, they usually hold full-time jobs in the community, practicing the skills they teach. A certified public accountant may teach accounting, an architect may instruct students in mechanical drawing, a town official may conduct a workshop in local government, the director of a day-care center may supervise the on-the-job training for a CCV student. The community college, in selecting competent teachers, values demonstrated knowledge in a field as much as formal education.

The CCV staff operates out of one central administrative office and nine field offices located throughout the state. Many outreach activities are directed from each of these field offices, thereby carrying learning opportunities and materials even further into Vermont's rural communities. The staff talks enthusiastically of "taking learning experiences to students instead of making students come to college." As might be expected, recruiting students is a nonexistent activity at CCV. Time, effort, and funds are spent instead, on <u>outreach</u> -- literally, reaching out to take services and resources to Vermont's adults as they continue to work and live in their own communities. Not just "community-based," the college might almost be said to be "community-placed."

Full-time staff members at the college do not teach, in the traditional sense of the term. Other than the fifteen or so individuals who make up the administration, CCV's staff members spend

can be evaluated and included in a study plan. Learning outside the classroom is encouraged. On-the-job training, apprenticeships, and independent study are important in many CCV students' learning programs. At the end of each course or learning experience, the student writes a narrative evaluation of his own performance and the value to him of the course. On the same evaluation form, the instructor writes an evaluation of the student's progress and areas for improvement.

In addition to self-evaluation, evaluation by instructors, and consultation with counselors, each degree candidate meets periodically with a "local review committee." This advisory and evaluative group comprises a fellow student, a CCV staff member, a community instructor, and an additional community member chosen by the student. At regular intervals, the student meets with the review committee to evaluate progress toward the degree.

Three programs of study, each with its own set of competencies, lead to an associate degree: Administrative Services, a program of study for students seeking office or business management skills; Human Services, for those interested in counseling, teaching, or related professions; and General Studies, for students interested in other areas. The local review committee considers a program of study completed when the student can demonstrate the acquisition of the competencies and skills specified in the program.

A great number of CCV students enroll for a course or two each term and continue taking courses on a sporadic, nonprogrammed basis, depending on the time and money left available by family and job responsibilities. The average CCV student is fully employed during

their time and energy on counseling students or guiding instructors. The members of the instructor-support staff, known as "coordinators of instruction," have three major responsibilities: through the use of questionnaires and contact with the community, they determine the community's needs for learning; by meeting and talking with community leaders, merchants, churchmen, and so forth, they secure space and facilities for college use; and, in interviews and discussions, they orient instructors and prospective instructors to the community college philosophy, give them instructional guidance and media support, and generally provide them with a person to turn to at any point during their teaching experience with the non-traditional college.

Counselors, referred to collectively as "student support," make up the greater portion of the full-time field staff. Whereas there may be only one or two coordinators of instruction for each region in which the college operates, counselors work out of each of the nine field offices. As the title of their division of the staff implies, they support students by providing advice, counseling, and direction. Rather than teaching content, these CCV staff members are dedicated to teaching the process of learning.

CCV students receive neither grades nor credits. Instead, the two-year associate degree is awarded on the basis of demonstrated skills and the acquisition of competencies agreed upon in advance. Each student desiring a degree meets regularly with a CCV counselor to draw up a "contract," which defines the student's goals in a chosen area of study. It is this process of "contracting" that forms the bulwark of CCV's commitment to learning. Past work experience

the day, has a family and a low income, and first enrolls in a CCV evening or weekend course to improve job skills, to acquire a craft or hobby, or just "to get out of the house." The college offers a wide range of courses in crafts, physical recreation, and home arts. Offerings in printing, auto mechanics, home plumbing, and yoga are perennially popular. When students do require credits for transfer to other institutions, the college uses the guidelines of the Carnegie Unit to arrive at semester-hour equivalent credits, depending on the amount of time spent in class.

CCV provides different types of students with a variety of instructional settings. Classes, independent study, experiential learning, and on-the-job training are all options made available to a diversity of learners. A fifth instructional model is the Cluster, a support group of students who meet together regularly to discuss with others their own problems, goals, hopes, and fears. This model is seen as most effective for those students who would be reluctant, for a variety of personal and educational reasons, to pursue their own education without peer support. Gradually, these students become more independently involved in courses and other learning experiences, but they return periodically to the Cluster for support and feedback.

The Community College of Vermont has gone to great lengths in its first five years to make learning a lifelong resource for Vermont's people. In December, 1975, its nontraditional, noncampus, community and competency-based system received full accreditation by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Inc. A member of

the state colleges system since 1972, the college now enables the state to deliver fully accredited, postsecondary education to adults who otherwise would have no access to it. The flexibility and variety of its instructional models, planning, management, and budgeting are all effectively bringing learners together with resources.

Case Study: A Student - Donna

Donna Cobb was a housewife and mother of two children. She had always enjoyed raising her family and maintaining their home. However, as the children reached high school age and became more independent, Donna became restless. She decided to find a part-time job to help meet the household expenses.

With only a high school diploma and no past work experience, it was hard for Donna to find a good job. Finally, after weeks of frustration she secured a job as a cashier in the local market. At the same time Donna resolved to learn typing so that eventually she could become a secretary.

One of Donna's friends had mentioned taking evening courses at the Community College of Vermont so she inquired about typing there. When she arrived at the College's office she spoke with a counselor who described the course offerings for Fall semester and explained the counseling and financial aid services available. Donna would register for her first college class two weeks later.

During her first semester at the Community College, Donna attended a typing class one evening a week. It was difficult to arrange her family schedule to free hereself for class and

practice time, but Donna really enjoyed learning her new skill. She enjoyed it so much in fact that she decided to take another course during the following semester.

Upon looking over the Spring listing of courses, Donna noticed that CCV granted an associate degree and decided to inquire about it. Assuming that a degree was a practical impossibility, Donna apologetically asked her Community College counselor about the degree. To her surprise Donna discovered that other working mothers in similar situations had received degrees. Donna also learned that she would play a major part in the design of her degree plan. Though she was apprehensive about her own skills, Donna became eager to try to plan a degree. Anxiously, she enrolled in a course designed to help her do just that.

While preparing her degree plan, Donna researched the business field in order to understand the demands of office occupations, looked at the course requirements or other community colleges around the country, and examined her own interests within the business field. In addition, she identified skills she had already acquired through her high school experience or through experiences outside of school.

Donna discovered that she had talents she had never recognized before. She realized that she had developed some outstanding interpersonal skills while raising her children and participating in PTA. She had also become a polished seamstress during years of making her family's clothes.

Donna wrote a degree plan which included her assessment of

those past learnings as well as her objectives for becoming a competent administrative worker. Donna had decided that she needed to increase her typing skills; to acquire a basic understanding of business management; and, because she had a special interest in history, to learn all that she could about Vermont history. These and other learning goals were included in her plan. Now Donna was ready to meet with her review committee to receive their suggestions about her degree.

At the first meeting with her committee Donna was encouraged by the committee's enthusiasm over her plan. Their primary recommendation was that she consider adding bookkeeping to her list of desired skills. At the end of the meeting the committee members volunteered to help Donna either individually or as a group throughout her stay at Community College.

Donna continued to take one course a semester and began to set up other learning experiences to fulfill her contract. She spent one day a week during one semester practicing her typing and bookkeeping skills in an on-the-job learning experience in a doctor's office. She also visited one of her review committee members to observe the variety of record keeping methods used in his company.

After three years of study and frequent contact with her review committee for opinions and suggestions, Donna knew that she had become a competent secretary. In fact, she had accepted a job as the office manager at the local Chamber of Commerce.

Donna began to wrap up her degree document by listing all of the skills she had acquired and by checking that she had evidence

of her comptence. When she was satisfied with the document, she asked the committee to review it again, telling them that she believed that she was ready for a degree. The local review committee agreed.

There was little question that Donna was ready for an associate degree. She had acquired the office skills necessary for a responsible position, she had begun her own small business on the side selling homemade children's clothing, and had exposed herself to a wide range of disciplines through her course selection. More importantly though, Donna had gained confidence in her abilities and the tools for determining and fulfilling her own goals.

Case Study: Some Obstacles and Solutions

The Community College of Vermont has experienced and survived a roller-coaster-ride of successes and opposition since its inception in 1970. Although they might appear to be inter-related as well as sequential, the opposition and obstacles faced by the college have been, in fact, neither. It is fare more illuminating to see them thematically and situationally, focussing, as they do, on the four general issues of institutional legitimacy, financing, duplication of effort, and program quality. With the exception of financing, the perenial bugbear of any new (not to mention old) educational model, the other themes are all directed at the essential credibility of the program. Those of us who might spend our time either planning or implementing lifelong learning programs would do well to advance on these potentially

threatening questions with serious intent and thereby turn them to our advantage. If the questions are well answered, then the problem of financing will be inestimably helped.

Although they will occur time and again in differing situations, the basic questions which we have confronted are these:

1. Legitimacy: What is your derivation, governmental or other? In short, where did you come from and who said you could? The Community College of Vermont was first recommended by a Governor's Task Force on Technical Education as an economic approach to the emerging postsecondary educational needs of Vermont's adults. Formed first as the Vermont Regional Community College Commission (VRCCC) through an Executive Order of the Governor in 1970, the college formally came of age with its entry into the Vermont State College system in 1972.

2. Duplication: What is the need for your operation? Aren't there already a whole slew of local and continuing education programs which can fill the bill?

There are, in fact, many local opportunities for adult learners already existing in the state of Vermont. That is precisely why the Community College of Vermont was established in its current form, with no facilities and no permanent faculty. Consequently, we can program with learners, in response to their needs, harnessing the rich local human, physical, and programmatic resources which already exist. What the college adds to the mix is the sequence of services which can translate a panoply of opportunity into a postsecondary educational program which meets the needs of the students.

3. Quality: What good is it? Any college which has neither the facilities nor faculty has to be a pretty bad place. That is a reasonable question, because any college should be able to talk to you about what they do well, why, and how. At CCV, we developed a competency-based contract approach to the Certificate and Associate Degree program as well as all individual learning experiences. This way, the learner, the instructor, and the college are talking about what the learner knows and can do as a result of the learning experience. This is absolutely necessary because the college has chosen not to use the traditional input indicators of quality upon which traditional colleges rest their claims. However, we also feel that it is a preferable route to go in any case. Clear statements about what has been learned within a competence framework of the student's and college's design is simply going to lead to better evaluation. Interestingly enough, our learners, both graduates and peripatetic, have enjoyed significant success economically, in further education, and in their personal and community lives. Although we have a long way to go in improving our learning support system, we do feel that it allows for the very highest quality learning within the context of the community.

These are clearly only the beginnings of complete answers to what are obviously very complex questions. However, from them I believe that we can infer some simple approaches when a lifelong learning program is being developed.

Don't Refute, Educate!

In most cases, the people who raise questions do so to get an answer. The program developer must work hard to anticipate the questions, develop clear answers, and present them to the questioner(s) in a specific manner. Refutations are not effective as responses to questions. Data, metaphors, and stories which illuminate the purposes and worth of the endeavor do work well.

Often, questions get at the unconscious question, "Why are you different?" In my experience, the best responses answer a better question, "What are we intended to achieve?" The two questions are vitally different because the first compares the program with other programs for validation while the second compares the program with its purposes. Consequently, information which answers questions while focusing on the college's purposes has always been helpful.

Know the Constituency of the Program

As important as a good pre-plan is, any new program must move quickly to develop a critical mass of consumers with accompanying "impact" information. These are both ways to display the distinctiveness, necessity, and utility of a new lifelong learning program. If decision makers meet people, both in person and through data, who have been well served, it supports the likelihood of positive decisions.

Distinguish Pattern From Function

There appears to be a fundamental confusion underlying much of the criticism and/or questioning of lifelong learning programs

such as the Community College of Vermont. It is the confusion of pattern (how education is delivered) with function (what education is delivered). All to often, decision makers question the pattern without even considering the function. For example, there are several methodologies for the functional evaluation of learning. Faculty evaluating learning with exams is a common pattern of evaluation. Consequently, if your program handles evaluation differently (as mine does) and questions about the quality of program evaluation arise, it may be useful to tease out questions of function from those of pattern. Having made this distinction, it can be shown how, although the pattern is different, the necessary function is present. While very few people would agree to an absence of evaluation in a postsecondary program, many more might agree to a different placement of the evaluative function. In any case, decision makers are well assisted by understanding what the pattern is, what the function is, and where they fit together.

## Conclusion

The Community College of Vermont has survived and prospered by listening carefully, answering helpfully, and attempting to convince by educating. The obstacles which confront any new life-long learning program should be answered clearly, simply, and educationally for the interrogator. While it may seem easier and more exciting to publish broadsides about the "need" for a program or its innovative nature, it is far more effective to see the obstacles as needs for "bread and butter" information and to supply

that information in a hard-headed, clear manner which clarifies the procedures and purposes of the colleges or programs in question. While none of this will automatically quiet the skeptics, it does honor our collective endeavor by presenting it from the strong base provided by educational thought and recent experience.

## FOOTNOTES

[1] Gollatscheck, et. al., The Community Development College, 1976, pp. 90-93.

[2] Community College of Vermont, Local Review Committee Handbook, 1976, pp. 1-2.